

Recommendations for Health Service Organizations to Improve Their Services for Trans Clients

Updated 1/06

Update Policy and Forms:

● Be gender inclusive with all forms. Do not only have the categories “male” and “female,” but also include “transgender” or “trans” for clients to check off. They may not always indicate they are trans or may check off more than one, but allow for possibilities. For example:

Your specific identification and the language you use to describe yourself are important to us to provide you with the best services. Please select all that apply:

Sex/Gender Identity:

Female

Male

Transgender:

Please tell us if you have additional words that you use to describe yourself within the transgender/transsexual umbrella? _____

Additional Comments: _____

● Some people born with an intersex condition may also identify as transgender, though most do not. It is important to not conflate the issues of trans people and people with an intersex condition by placing them both within the transgender umbrella. Instead educate and advocate about the specific health care needs and issues with medical abuse that this community faces. In addition, the inclusion of “Intersex” as a gender or sex category (as in the box above) is not recommended for a variety of reasons including the fact that most people with an intersex condition identify as male or female, as highlighted by Emi Koyama from the Intersex Initiative Portland [for further information about this please see Emi Koyama’s article at www.ipdx.org/articles/letter-outsidein.html]. The health care needs of people with an intersex condition should be a priority for all health educators and health care providers [for further information and education please contact The Intersex Society of North America at www.isna.org].

● Include as part of an intake form the question: “What name do you prefer to be called?” Many trans people do not go by their birth names.

● Include gender expression and gender identity in your organization’s official nondiscrimination policies. This helps to provide a safe educational and work environment for everyone.

● Develop specific guidelines about how to record, document, and address issues of harassment and verbal and physical abuse dealing with gender expression or gender identity, from client to staff, staff to staff, staff to client, and client-to-client.

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Lydia A. Sausa, Ph.D., M.S. Ed., C.S.E. *Human Sexuality Educator, Trainer & Consultant*
Phone: (415) 554-0130 or E-mail: lydiasausa@hotmail.com or Web site: www.lydiasausa.com.

Use Appropriate Language:

- Train staff to use gender-neutral language with clients and do not assume the sexual orientation of a trans person. Trans people can be any sexual orientation, including heterosexual. Be aware of your possible assumptions. For example, use *parent* or *guardian* instead of *mother/father*, use *partner* instead of *girlfriend/boyfriend*.
- Respect trans people by using appropriate pronouns for their gender identity and gender expression, or simply use their preferred name. When in doubt, ask! [Please be aware that some people may prefer gender neutral pronouns such as “ze” instead of he or she, and “zir” instead of his or her.]
- Be sensitive to possible discriminatory language. For example, if your organization gives out safer sex supplies such as the “Reality” condom, do not refer to it as the “female condom.” Many males use it as well, and the term “female condom” may influence masculine trans people or transmen to avoid it because it implies femaleness. Also, create safer sex resources using photos and images of trans people, and language and terminology used by trans people.

Create a Safe Environment:

- Include trans specific literature, brochures, books, magazines, artwork, and posters in your waiting area and throughout your organization. This helps people to feel welcomed and more comfortable.
- Be an ally to and advocate for trans people. Create an atmosphere in which derogatory remarks regarding trans people are not acceptable. Challenge put-downs and dispel myths and stereotypes about the trans community.
- Hire openly trans people as staff who would provide valuable knowledge about trans needs and concerns, as well as help clients feel represented in your organization.
- Remove *MEN’s* and *WOMEN’s* restroom labels, or create additional gender inclusive restrooms. Many trans people have been harassed, even physically removed by security personnel, for entering the “wrong” bathroom. This is especially common for people who do not fit into the dichotomous gender norms of our society, such as a masculine or androgynous woman who has been mistaken as a “man” entering the *WOMEN’s* bathroom. To help create a safer atmosphere for trans clients and staff, universal gender inclusive *RESTROOMS* are essential. [If you are creating gender inclusive restrooms at your facility in addition to men’s and women’s restrooms, please note that some trans people are more comfortable using the men’s or women’s restroom because they identify as such, therefore please do not simply section off all trans people to the gender inclusive bathrooms. Please allow for the differences in gender identity among trans individuals by creating spaces for everyone to feel comfortable and safe.]
- Do not “out” trans staff who do not wish others to know about their history or experiences. Please ask their permission before telling others and honor confidentiality. Note that some people may be out in some aspects of their lives, but not in all. In regards to trans clients, sometimes client histories are discussed among staff members to provide better services, though if it is not essential, do not out a client.

Provide Staff Training:

- Take a trans sensitivity inventory of your organization. Periodic educational workshops and in-service training are important to provide current information about the needs of trans people, and assist staff with any concerns or questions. Workshops and training should be periodic to address changes among staff in your organization and keep the entire staff up-to-date on current resources.

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- Ask for help from trans specific local and national organizations. Build collaborative relationships between your organization and local centers, organizations, and support groups. If your organization cannot meet the needs of a trans client, put their best interests first, and refer them to someone who is better qualified or more experienced.

Increase Education & Improve Outreach:

- If your organization provides education and outreach, be inclusive of the needs of trans people in your services, programming, and resources. In addition, create and provide trans-specific resources for your trans clients and clients who have trans partners.

- Educate your education and outreach staff on the differences among various trans identities, including cross dressers, transsexuals, drag artists, androgynes, genderqueer people, etc., and how their health care needs may differ, especially for youth, homeless people, persons whom are HIV-positive, and sex workers.

- Create a support or discussion group that is inclusive of all gender variant people, or create multiple groups to address the various needs among the trans community.

- Collaborate with trans people to develop and administer a needs assessment in your community to find out current concerns among trans people, record statistics, and acquire funding to increase or create trans specific services and resources.

Establish Resources:

- Establish collaborations with trans people and trans specific organizations to create changes in your organization and in your community.

- Designate a resource person in your organization to update and provide trans specific resources for staff and clients. These resources may include hotlines, listings of local and national trans organizations, listings of local support groups and medical providers who specifically service trans people, recent articles, books, and brochures. Having an accurate and current base of information is helpful for making effective referrals and attaining vital knowledge.

- Provide direct and specific outreach to the trans community. If your organization develops brochures or implements educational workshops, be sure to include specific information about trans people to address their needs and concerns, or develop trans-specific resources.

- Fund staff to attend trans specific conferences to educate themselves, and encourage them to present their findings at an organization meeting or share their information with other staff.

- Learn about the variety of current Internet resources, such as list serve discussion groups and web sites, to gain more information about trans people and their experiences. Also create a list serve for your organization as a way of providing support and sharing information among staff and clients. Many clients may not have access to a computer, developing a list of places in which they can access one for free, such as local schools or libraries, or providing a computer in your organization lobby with a time limit, may be helpful.

- Create a Transgender Resource Guide recommending local organizations in the area that provide trans specific services or are trans friendly.

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